Margrett Scaff's birth and parentage

In a review some years ago,[1] I concluded that Margrett was Ezekiel Scaff's daughter from his second marriage to Elizabeth Dunn rather than from his first marriage to Elizabeth Hill; and that she was born in Georgia in about 1855, rather than in Charleston, South Carolina on 18 August 1853 as reported on her death certificate.

But new information contained in a Chancery suit over John Scaff's estate calls some of my earlier conclusions into question. This record also identifies a heretofore unknown daughter of Ezekiel's named Marintha who died in childhood.

The suit

The plaintiffs were William J. Morris & wife (Sarah Scaff), Thomas Hill & wife (Mary Scaff), Ezekiel Hill & wife (Chloe Scaff), Ira Oliver & wife (Sarah Seymore, daughter of Zilpha Scaff), Riley Scaff and John Riley Seymore (son of Zilpha Scaff).

The defendants were Emilla Scaff (widow), William Alexander Seymore (son of Zilpha Scaff) and Ezekiel Scaff and his children, i.e., Chloe, Sarah A., Emily P., J. Early, Margaret M. and Marintha Scaff.

This "Bill for account and partition" was filed on 25 January 1854 and amended on January 30th based on the report that Marintha was deceased. The suit was a formality to get the court's involvement in partitioning the estate and will be discussed in greater detail in a separate review, together with an earlier suit in 1851.

In the earlier suit, Ira Oliver was appointed guardian *ad litem* for the two Seymores and he continued in that capacity in this suit but for John only. Ezekiel Scaff was appointed guardian *ad litem* for William and his own children.

Why Ezekiel's children were named while he was still living

John Scaff's will directed that after his wife's death the slaves were to be divided between his children Riley Scaff, Sarah Morris, Mary Hill and Chloe Hill and *the children* of Ezekiel Scaff, with a stipulation that the slaves going to Ezekiel's children not be divided or sold until the youngest of Ezekiel's children came of age.

I did not find Ezekiel in the 1850 census in either South Carolina or Georgia but this new record suggests he was probably still in Darlington then.

Margrett's date of birth

The January 1854 file date obviously means that Margrett was born earlier than I had previously concluded but it does not necessarily corroborate the August 1853 birthdate

[1] "Ezekiel Scaff's two marriages," uploaded to the Newman Family Tree on 21 Aug 2012, with a comment since added by this compiler to note that the information is incorrect and would be updated.

her son reported. The petition names Ezekiel's children and states that the youngest child was under the age of one. On every page the children were named, they appear to be listed in their birth order as far as this is known, and with Marintha the last-named child implying that she was the youngest:

- Chloe, likely the C. Scaff, born in about 1840 and living with her aunt and uncle, Ezekiel and Chloe (Scaff) Hill, in the 1860 Darlington County census
- Sarah A., born in about March 1842 according to the 1900 Wilcox County, Georgia census
- Emily P., born in December 1845 according to her grave marker (from the Siloam cemetery survey in *Passing of the Pines*, Vol. I)
- J. Early aka John Early, born in December 1848 according to his legislative bio
- Margrett
- Marintha

If this ordering of children was by age, then the August 1853 birthdate for Margrett does not fit unless she and Marintha were twins born on that date (and the petition would presumably have said youngest *children* in that case). It *would* fit, however, if the ordering was incidental rather than deliberate and Margrett was indeed the youngest.

Margrett's place of birth

The Chancery suit leaves little room for doubt that Margrett was born in South Carolina, and there is nothing in this record to suggest that Ezekiel and his family were anywhere other than Darlington when the suit was initiated: he was served with the subpoena two days after the suit was filed, so the server did not have far to go; and there was no mention of a legal notice being published as would be expected if Ezekiel had been living outside of South Carolina.

Jack Gibbs reported that Margrett was born in Charleston and this possibility cannot be ruled out despite how unlikely it seems. It's a common error to assume that because we consistently find someone in one location they never stirred from there in between these sightings, but our ancestors were often more mobile than we imagined.

Elizabeth Dunn and Ezekiel Scaff marriage

Elizabeth said in her widow's pension application that they married in August 1853, but she did not say where. No marriage record has been found in Houston County, where she was living in 1850 with her parents, Joseph and Mary Dunn. There are no *obvious* gaps in the marriage books shown for this county at Georgia's Virtual Vault and a record has not been found elsewhere in Georgia in any of the various marriage collections.

If the marriage date is indeed correct, then in light of this new record the possibility that they met and married in Darlington County cannot be ruled out. Unfortunately, South

Carolina did not require statewide registration until 1911, which explains why no marriage records have been found for any of the early Scaffs.

Darlington County — Hill family connection: Elizabeth said in an 1894 affidavit for Mahala Hill's pension application that she was born in Darlington; that she was Mahala's cousin; and that she had known Mahala and her deceased husband Samuel in Darlington. I don't yet know how Samuel and Mahala fit in with the Hills in Darlington but there is evidence to suggest that Elizabeth Dunn's paternal grandmother was Nancy Dunn, who was named as a daughter in Isaac Hill's 1799 Darlington County will.

The Joseph Dunn family was in Darlington for the 1820 and 1830 censuses and the 1820 household included a female over the age of 45 who might have been Nancy. These Dunns moved to Georgia in the early 1830s, judging from the birthplaces of the younger children as reported in the 1850 census.

Margrett's mother

Three sources are in direct or potential conflict on this question:

- Jack Gibbs reported that Margrett was born on 18 August 1853 and her mother was Miss Hill
- John Early Scaff said in his legislative bio that Elizabeth Hill died in about 1850 when he was two years old
- Elizabeth Dunn said that she married Ezekiel in August 1853

Of the three, Elizabeth is the only one who was unquestionably a primary source as she was a participant in the event she was reporting.

Margrett's son was reporting secondhand information since he was neither a participant nor a witness to the event, and his reliability as informant depends on how well he remembered what he had been told. But the *specificity* of his information, especially the maiden name of Ezekiel's *first* wife, lends it weight — how would he even know this name if Margrett hadn't told him, and why would she tell him if this wasn't her mother?

John Early was reporting an event that he said occurred when he was about two years old. Did he remember the actual event or was this what he remembered being told about it? He was born in December 1848 so in August 1853 he would still have been under five; is it possible that Elizabeth Hill died from childbirth complications around that time and he remembered the details wrong?

Are the two August 1853 events connected — Margrett's birth and Elizabeth Dunn's marriage to Ezekiel — and confirmation of the family lore that was passed down to me, that Margrett's mother died giving birth to her and her father remarried to provide her with a mother? There are still too many unanswered questions and conflicting reports to say for certain but this now looks like a distinct possibility.